



Highlights of [GAO-10-867](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The United States depends on a vast network of pipelines to transport energy. GAO was asked to review the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) efforts to help ensure pipeline security. This report addresses the extent to which TSA's Pipeline Security Division (PSD) has (1) assessed risk and prioritized efforts to help strengthen pipeline security, (2) implemented agency guidance and requirements of the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Commission Act) regarding pipeline security, and (3) measured its performance in strengthening pipeline security. GAO reviewed PSD's risk assessment process and performance measures and observed 14 PSD reviews and inspections scheduled during the period of GAO's review. Although these observations are not generalizable, they provided GAO an understanding of how PSD conducts reviews and inspections.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that TSA, among other things, establish time frames for improving risk model data, document its method for scheduling reviews, develop a plan for transmitting recommendations to operators, follow up on its recommendations, include performance measures linked to objectives in its pipeline strategy, and develop more outcome measures. DHS concurred with the recommendations and discussed planned actions, but not all will fully address the recommendations, as discussed in the report.

[View GAO-10-867](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Steve Lord at (202) 512-4379 or [lords@gao.gov](mailto:lords@gao.gov).

## PIPELINE SECURITY

### TSA Has Taken Actions to Help Strengthen Security, but Could Improve Priority-Setting and Assessment Processes

#### What GAO Found

PSD identified the 100 most critical pipeline systems and developed a pipeline risk assessment model based on threat, vulnerability, and consequence, but could improve the model's consequence component and better prioritize its efforts. The consequence component takes into account the economic impact of a possible pipeline attack, but not other possible impacts such as public health and safety, as called for in the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) risk management guidance. PSD plans to improve its model by adding more vulnerability and consequence data, but has no time frames for doing so. Establishing a plan with time frames, as called for by standard management practices, could help PSD enhance the data in, and use of, its risk assessment model. Also, PSD procedures call for scheduling Corporate Security Reviews (CSR)—assessments of pipeline operators' security planning—based primarily on a pipeline system's risk, but GAO's analysis of CSR data suggests a system's risk was not the primary consideration. Documenting a methodology for scheduling CSRs that includes how to balance risk with other factors could help PSD ensure it prioritizes its oversight of systems at the highest risk.

PSD has taken actions to implement agency guidance that outlines voluntary actions for pipeline operators and 9/11 Commission Act requirements for pipeline security, but lacks a system for following up on its security recommendations to pipeline operators. PSD established CSR and Critical Facility Inspection (CFI) Programs in 2003 and 2008, respectively, and has completed CSRs of the 100 most at-risk systems, started conducting second CSRs, and completed 224 of 373 one-time CFIs. Both programs result in recommendations, but PSD does not generally send CSR recommendations to operators in writing or follow up to ensure that CSR and CFI recommendations were implemented. Standard project management practices call for plans that define approaches and start dates and Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government calls for monitoring to ensure review findings are resolved. Developing a plan for how and when PSD will begin transmitting CSR recommendations to operators, and following up on CSR and CFI recommendations could better inform PSD of the state of pipeline security and whether operators have addressed vulnerabilities.

PSD has taken steps to gauge its progress in strengthening pipeline security, but its ability to measure improvements is limited. In its pipeline security strategy, PSD does not include performance measures or link them to objectives, which GAO previously identified as desirable in security strategies. In addition, PSD developed performance measures, including one outcome measure to gauge its efforts to help operators reduce vulnerabilities identified in CSRs. However, the outcome measure does not link to all three of PSD's objectives and provides limited information on improvements in areas such as physical security. According to DHS risk management guidance, outcome measures should link to objectives. Including measures linked to objectives in its strategy and developing more outcome measures directly linked to all of its objectives could help PSD improve accountability and assess improvements.